Responsibility to One's Family

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In the Name of Allâh, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

By Sheikh Salman al-'Awdah

Islam stresses mutual responsibility between family members, making it the solid foundation that protects the family from collapsing or splitting apart.

This responsibility starts with the husband and wife. They have a shared responsibility to carry out the obligations and duties of family life in the manner that Allah has made each of them naturally disposed to carry out. Allah's Messenger (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: *"A man is a guardian over his household and he is responsible for those in his care. A woman is a guardian over her husband's household and she is responsible for those in her care."*

Household responsibilities are divided between the man and the woman in a way that guarantees the material and spiritual foundations of the family. Allah addresses the men and women who run their homes with the following words:

"O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones." This protection cannot happen except if the truth is made clear and proper education is provided that clearly shows the way to righteousness. The husband and wife share the responsibility for the education and cultural development of the family. Whenever either one of them finds the other negligent in these duties, he or she must bring this to the other's attention and call the other to what is right.

Allah says:

"The believing men and women are protectors of one another; they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong." Islam encourages the cultivation of love and affection between the man and woman in their marital life. Allah says:

"And from His signs is that he created for you mates from amongst yourselves to find comfort in and he placed between you affection and mercy." Islam has established a number of principles to bring this about:

A. Preserving the rights of the husband and wife: Allah says:

"And they (the women) have rights (over their husbands) similar to (their husbands') rights over them."

B. Choosing a good marriage partner: The family unit is where children are brought up. It is imperative that this unit is established on a correct foundation. Allah's Messenger (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: *"A woman is married for four reasons: for her wealth, her status, her beauty, or her religion. Marry the religious one or your hands will be covered with dust."*

With respect to what a woman should seek in a husband, Allah's Messenger said: *"If a man whose religion and conduct pleases you approaches you (to marry from your family), then let him marry. If you do not do so, then there will be a lot of mischief and moral degradation in the land."*

Allah says:

"Do not marry the idolatrous women until they believe. A believing slave girl is better than an idolatress, even if she pleases you. And do not marry your women to the idolaters until they believe. A believing slave is better than an idolater, even if he pleases you. They call to the Fire, and Allah calls to Paradise and forgiveness by His leave, and He makes His signs clear to mankind so perhaps they might take heed."

C. Good conduct between the husband and wife: Islam encourages good conduct between the husband and wife. This is established in the texts of the Qur'ân and Sunnah. Allah says:

"Live with them on good terms."

Allah says:

"Retain them on good terms or release them on good terms."

Allah's Messenger (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: *"The believers who have the most perfect faith are the best in conduct and the best men among you are the ones who are best to their wives."*

Allah's Messenger (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the best in treating his wives and was the kindest and most gentle husband.

He used to joke with them and help out with the housework. He was very forgiving and tolerant. Allah's Messenger (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: *"The best among you is the one who treats his family the best, and I am the one who treats his family the best."*

D. Providing for one's family: Wealth is necessary to provide for the material needs of life. Since, the husband is responsible for his wife, he is responsible to provide for her. Allah says:

"Let the wealthy man spend according to his means; and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend from according to what Allah has given him. Allah does not put a burden on a person greater than what He has given him. Allah will grant, after hardship, ease." Islam has made maintenance of the wife obligatory upon the husband. Even if he has divorced her, he must provide for her maintenance and housing for the full waiting period that the woman must wait – to ascertain whether she is pregnant – before she is allowed to marry another. Likewise, he must provide for the child's nursing if the divorced woman has a child from him. Allah says:

"Lodge them where you dwell, according to your means, and do not harm them to make their lives difficult (so they will be forced to leave your house). And if they are pregnant, then spend on them until they give birth. Then if they nurse the children for you, then give them their due payment, and let each of you accept the advice of the other in a just way. If you make difficulties for one another, then some other woman may nurse for him."

E. Caring for and raising children: Islam stresses the right of small children to be cared for and properly brought up, making it the most important duty of the parents. Islam does not consider it sufficient to rely on the parents' natural inclinations. It reinforces these instincts with specific regulations that guarantee that the children will receive a proper upbringing and enjoy all of their rights.

From the time of birth, the sacred texts discuss completing the period of nursing. Allah says:

"The mothers shall nurse their children for two whole years if they desire to complete the term of suckling. The father of the child shall bear the cost of the mother's food and clothing on a reasonable basis." The right of proper upbringing is also clearly stated. Allah says:

"O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire."

Allah's Messenger (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: *"Order your children to pray when they are seven years old, and when they become ten, beat them if they fail to do so and separate their sleeping quarters."*

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